

**History of**  
**Bethel Mennonite Church**  
**1947 - 1972**

by Ray K. Hacker

**2100 Manor Ridge Drive**  
**Lancaster, Pennsylvania**

**March 1972**

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## PREFACE

On February 9, 1947 the Bethel Mennonite Church was officially organized. On that date its first officers were elected and the name "Bethel Mennonite Church" was chosen. During the week-end of April 9, 1972 the congregation will celebrate the 25th anniversary of that event. At the same time, they will commemorate the closing of the charter membership, the first baptism, and the first communion service, all of which happened during those early months of 1947.

Twelve of the thirty-nine charter members continue as active members of the fellowship. Death has claimed five of the original members. The remaining twenty-two have either moved from the Lancaster area or for various reasons have united with other Christian churches. This would indicate that most of Bethel's members, now numbering nearly 200, have not experienced its formative years or even its middle years. To provide the facts involved in its establishment is the purpose of this history. It was written so that all of Bethel's past, present, and future members and friends may be familiar with, not only, how it came to be, but how it grew; so that they may know what its joys and concerns have been, what its Christian ministry has been, and what its hopes are for the future.

To give direction to the 25th anniversary celebration the Church Council appointed a Program Committee and a Historical Committee. The Historical Committee, consisting of Anna McIntyre, Leonard Gaeddert, and Ray Hacker, planned the publication of two booklets: A pictorial directory of the present membership and this historical account. It is the hope of the Historical Committee that this history will serve as both inspiration and challenge to continue building on the heritage of faith and action; to go forward with renewed commitment in Christian love and concern; and to serve Christ and His Church in creative and imaginative ways.

06/11/90  
The following sources were most helpful in compiling the history: "Minutes of the Eastern District Conference Home Mission and Church Extension Committee" (1944-1950); "Official Proceedings of the Eastern District Conference" (1945-1960); "The Mennonite;" "The Messenger;" "Minutes of the Bethel Church Council" (1948-1972); "Annual Reports of the Bethel Church" (1949-1972); "Constitutions of the Bethel Church" (1947, 1952, 1961); and correspondence with each of the former pastors as well as with several former members and friends. Personal and telephone

interviews with past and present members proved to be a valuable source for many facts and interpretations.

To all of the above sources I am deeply indebted. To all who gave their time for reflection or for reading the manuscript, I say "Thank you." To the members of the Historical Committee, to Pastor Bartel, and to the many who gave their support with expressions of interest and encouragement I am most grateful. To Raymond Harnly, for supplying several of the photographs, I am also grateful. To Mrs. Esther Whitely, my colleague at Millersville, I wish to express my thanks for her most helpful assistance in editing the manuscript. A special word of appreciation is extended to Dr. Solomon E. Yoder, the sole surviving member of the original local planning committee, and therefore, in a sense, the patriarch of the congregation. Although, until recently, only an associate member, Dr. Yoder has been a moving spirit, not only as a capable Sunday School teacher, but as a faithful member who has been serving the congregation in innumerable ways. His knowledge of the early years and his financial assistance in the publication of this history is deeply appreciated.

February 23, 1972

Ray K. Hacker

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1944-1946

"In view that Rev. Sylvan S. Lehman has resigned as pastor of Calvary Menn. Ch., Quarryville, it has seemed advisable to consider work in Lancaster, Pa. or possible some place near Lancaster, Pa.

Moved by Bechtel seconded by Stauffer that Rev. Swartz, Neuenschwander & Plenert go to Lancaster to make a preliminary survey as to the possibilities and also visit Dr. Solomon Yoder and Rev. Hess and such other contacts as they deem necessary. Carried."

With this action on May 22, 1944, the Eastern District Home Missions committee<sup>1</sup> set in motion the beginning of what was to become the Bethel Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pa. As directed, Rev. Swartz, Neuenschwander, and Plenert traveled to Lancaster during the early part of the summer and were able to make several valuable contacts with people regarding the possibility of the General Conference Mennonite Church opening work in Lancaster city. Following this visit, the three men were ready to make the following recommendation on July 31: "The field needs further study and surveying. Therefore we suggest to have Fellowships at least once a month to start with and then after that make further plans."

The Lancaster field was given further consideration by the Home Missions Committee at its September 9 meeting. At this meeting, it was agreed that the first Fellowship meeting in Lancaster be held on Sunday, September 24, in the YMCA between 4:00 and 5:30 p.m. Rev. and Mrs. A. J. Neuenschwander and Rev. and Mrs. Freeman H. Swartz were asked to be in charge as representatives of the Home Missions Committee of the Eastern District Conference. This first meeting of the Lancaster Fellowship was held as scheduled on September 24, 1944 in the Lancaster YMCA with more than thirty interested persons in attendance. At that time the YMCA was located on the northwest corner of Queen and Orange Streets. Assisting the members of the Home Missions Committee was a local committee in Lancaster consisting of Dr. S. E. Yoder, who continues to be active and Dr. D. C. Frost.

During the November 6 meeting of the Home Missions Committee, Mr. Herbert Stauffer, a member of the committee, stated that he attended the Lancaster Fellowship service on October 22. While attending the service, he learned that a number of MCC men and some young women were willing and glad to come to Lancaster to attend the monthly services. He also learned that these MCC people have a 60¢ trolley fare to pay from Akron (presumably round trip fare) "and that on account of the hour of the

<sup>1</sup> The complete name of this committee was "Home Mission and Church Extension Committee of the Eastern District Conference."



Fellowship, 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., they miss their supper at MCC dining room and hence must buy something instead." Since "this did not seem just to ask that much from the C.P.S. boys who receive so little salary—almost none at all" the following action was taken by the Committee: "That the Home Mission Committee appropriate \$5.00 per meeting and send same to the Local Committee, Mr. D. C. Frost, Lancaster, Pa., Rt. #6, or Dr. S. E. Yoder, 610 Race St., Lancaster, Pa., and that we kindly ask the Home Mission Board<sup>2</sup> to appropriate a similar amount to cover all expenses incurred by MCC men and girls who attend the monthly Fellowship. —Carried."

The exact amount appropriated or spent, if any, for this purpose is not known. The Committee's expenditures during the 1944-1945 Conference year are not completely itemized in its annual report. However, the Committee's checking account record indicates one \$5.00 expenditure to Dr. D. C. Frost for expenses of the Lancaster Fellowship. All total, the records seem to indicate that only \$30.00 to \$35.00 was expended by the Home Missions Committee during the first eight months (September-April) for the support of the Lancaster work. What financial support may have been given by the General Conference Board of Home Missions is not known.



Lancaster YMCA, Queen and Orange Streets. The Fellowship met here from 1944 to 1946. This building was razed in 1967.

<sup>2</sup> This would have been the "Board of Home Missions" of The General Conference.



During the first year or so, the Fellowship continued to meet quite regularly on a once per month basis. Various pastors from the Eastern District Conference churches were invited to travel to Lancaster to conduct the worship services.<sup>3</sup> These pastors were also encouraged to "take some other folks along so as to encourage the group." It became evident very early that there was much interest and support for continuing the Fellowship. By February 1945, attendance had reached an average of 70 persons, a group too large for the meeting place in the YMCA. Because of this situation, the local committee of the Fellowship was encouraged to look for a more suitable meeting place. Beginning about this time, there was a strong feeling expressed by the local committee (Frost, Yoder, and Mr. D. M. Landis) that they should meet more often than once a month. However, for various reasons the Home Missions Committee encouraged them to delay the suggested change.

Another interesting development during the spring of 1945 was the dialogue between the Lancaster Fellowship and a Christian Fellowship under the leadership of Rev. Amos Rutt. Rev. Elmer Hess, a personal friend of Rev. Rutt and pastor of the Emmanuel Mennonite Church, located at that time near Denver, Pa., was asked to visit with Rev. Rutt for purposes of getting "some feelers" on the possibility of bringing about a closer cooperation with his group. Rev. Hess reported to the Home Missions Committee on July 16, 1945 that Rev. Rutt's group, known as Berean Fellowship, holds its services in a fire hall. Rev. Hess further reported that: "Rev. Rutt had stated that if his people would be interested, he would be willing to join in fellowship with our Fellowship. But he was afraid that his people would not be willing since they had feared some theological difficulties in our Conference." (This group eventually dissolved within a few years.) It was pretty well agreed that sufficient effort had been made in welcoming Rev. Rutt's group into the Mennonite Fellowship and that the time had come to forget about a possible merger but instead to plan for Lancaster Fellowship's future.

By early summer of 1945, the Home Missions Committee felt very much encouraged by the progress of the Lancaster Fellowship. The combination of a sustained interest and capable local lay leadership made for a promising future. The local leaders were pressing the Home Missions Committee to "take some definite steps for more meetings and also consider a permanent organization and place a mature worker in charge." With this kind of enthusiasm being expressed by the local group, the Home Missions Committee, at its June 25, 1945 meeting, passed the following resolution: "In view of the fact that the work in Lancaster has progressed under the Mennonite Fellowship the past year, we as the Home Missions Committee of the Eastern District Conference are ready

<sup>3</sup> Many of these pastors would have traveled from Bucks or Montgomery County.

to launch out with the support of the Home Mission Board of the General Conference and with the cooperation of the Mennonite Fellowship, Lancaster, Pa. and start an active church." As members of both the Home Missions Committee and the Board of Home Missions, Rev. Neuenschwander and Rev. Plenert were able to speak with unusual authority in support of such commitments. As an indication that they took their resolution quite seriously, the Home Missions Committee, on the same day, decided to confer with the local committee relative to extending an invitation to Rev. Delbert Welty to undertake the leadership for the Lancaster work. There is, of course, a reason for the Committee's selection of Rev. Welty. The work at the Memorial Mennonite Church in Altoona, which Rev. Welty pastored, was in the process of being phased out because of severe economic conditions in Altoona and the lack of dependable lay leadership within that congregation. Whatever became of the proposal is not known as the records do not mention Rev. Welty again in relation to the Lancaster Fellowship. The Home Missions Committee further expressed its faith in the Lancaster work by budgeting \$500.00 for this project for the 1945-1946 Conference year.

In July 1945, a joint meeting of the Home Missions Committee and the local committee decided to make an attempt at organizing something permanent from the existing unorganized Fellowship. It was reported that about 50 people were on the mailing list with an average of 20 to 40 percent of these people attending. This was considered about the average as church attendance goes. There was a definite feeling that the group should move ahead in faith and establish something permanent. Further discussion resulted in a decision to undertake a general survey. It was agreed that Rev. Alfred Regier, pastor of the Calvary Mennonite Church, Mechanics Grove, Pa., who was present at the meeting, be asked to conduct the survey. He was instructed to visit every home on the mailing list for purposes of ascertaining "their interests, what church affiliations they do have, if any, if they are permanently located in Lancaster, if they have thought of joining a church, and if so, what church they preferred, if the General Conference Mennonite Church would start a church organization, would they be willing to join it or give it their moral support, etc."

Unfortunately, a copy of Regier's report is not available but the October 29 minutes of the Home Missions Committee reveal that the survey found some forty families whose variant interest ranged from "very much interested" to "interested, but too late; we have begun attending elsewhere." The polity upon which the Lancaster work was begun and continued was that there were many persons in Lancaster city and surrounding community who did not affiliate with the Mennonite Church simply because they could not find a fellowship that met all their needs. The consequence was that they were uniting elsewhere, joining groups outside of the Mennonite faith. Some General Conference members living in Lancaster and

others who lived nearby urged the Home Missions Committee to move forward in establishing a Fellowship.

Two of the major topics discussed at the October 29, 1945 meeting were location and leadership. The local committee had been quite busy in searching for a location. Two possible locations were already under consideration. These were a lot in the Grandview section and a Presbyterian Church back of Hamilton Watch Company. This would probably have been the Bethany Presbyterian Church. At that time the congregation was considering selling the church building and relocating at a different site. Instead the building was dismantled and the Bethany congregation re-built a new house of worship on the same site in 1954.

The members of the Home Missions Committee were evidently continuing to give some thought to the question of leadership as Rev. Freeman Swartz inquired about the possibility of Rev. Don Smucker as a prospect for the work while he is attending Princeton Seminary. It was agreed that Rev. Smucker be asked to conduct the worship service in Lancaster on November 11, 1945.

During the second year, the committee used several men to carry on its work. Rev. John Boehr supplied during the late fall and early winter months (1945-46). Rev. Smucker was used occasionally from February until June of 1946. At other times various Eastern District pastors conducted the worship services.

Sensing the desire for worship, at other than just the monthly fellowship services, the Home Missions Committee arranged to have Rev. J. H. Janzen of Waterloo, Ontario hold special evening services in Lancaster on Monday, November 19 to Wednesday, the 21st 1945. The services were held in the Bethany Presbyterian Church, located at 25 North West End Avenue. These services proved to be a great blessing. This might be hard to understand but these services resulted in calling only special meetings instead of the monthly meetings. One of the reasons why the monthly meetings ceased for several months was because the YMCA as a meeting place was a deterrent to the growth of the work. It was quite a task for some of the elderly persons to climb the two flights of steps to the third floor auditorium. So also was the time of meeting. The services were held in the afternoon. The hours were changed several times to accommodate the attenders, some of whom came from neighboring farmsteads. Following a brief absence of regular monthly meetings, the meeting place was changed to the Lancaster School of the Bible located at that time at 128 North Mulberry Street. Sunday afternoon fellowship gatherings were resumed at this location in March of 1946. This chapel was on the first floor. Here the attendance increased, reaching as high as 130 at one meeting.

After spending much time searching the Lancaster area for the most suitable location for a General Conference church, it was finally agreed that the Grandview section would be a good place





**Lancaster School of the Bible, 128 N. Mulberry Street. The Fellowship met here in the spring of 1946.**

to locate. This was a new residential section northeast of the city in Manheim Township. On Tuesday, February 5, 1946, a new venture of faith was agreed upon. The Home Missions Committee with the Executive Committee of the Eastern District Conference motored to Lancaster and took an option on the southwest corner lots (150 feet by 158 feet) of Skyline Drive and Oregon Boulevard. At 4:00 P.M. the Rev. Howard G. Nyce, President, and the Rev. Ward W. Shelly, Secretary of the Conference, signed the necessary papers. Mr. Herbert Stauffer, treasurer of the Home Missions Committee gave a check for \$300.00 as a ten percent down payment on the above mentioned lots.

The purchase of those lots was truly a commitment of faith. At this point the Fellowship was still unorganized, no constitution, no elected officers, no membership, and no pastor. As a matter of fact, a place to hold their worship services continued to be a major concern. They now had a building site but erecting a building on

it was really not within the foreseeable future. Now that a down payment commitment was made on the lots, where would the funds come from to pay the remaining \$2,700.00? Realizing that May 15 was the date for the final settlement on the lots and sensing a wide interest within the conference for the Lancaster work, the Home Missions Committee decided to present the following recommendation to the annual Eastern District Conference session at its May 1946 conference which was held in Souderton: "That Sunday, May 19th, be observed as Lancaster Day in our Eastern District Conference Churches for the purpose to raise \$3,000.00 to pay for the lots purchased by our committee in Lancaster, Pa."

The Home Missions Committee was also able to announce at this conference that the Board of Home Missions of the General Conference had taken action to put \$10,000.00 from the sale of the Memorial Mennonite Church in Altoona at the disposal of the Building Committee for the Lancaster church. During the 1945-46 Conference year the General Conference contributed \$250.00 toward the Lancaster work. The Eastern District's contribution that year must have been approximately \$295.00 as the total conference expenditures for the work was between \$540.00 and \$550.00 including the down payment for the lots.

How did the Eastern District Conference churches respond to Lancaster Day on May 19, 1946? It is most gratifying to read the May 1947 Home Missions Committee annual report. This report gives a carefully itemized statement indicating a total income for the 1946-47 conference year for Lancaster of \$4,682.55. Of this amount \$1,231.00 was received from Eastern District Conference funds (since only \$350.00 was budgeted for this purpose, one must surmise that individuals or churches sent their contributions to the Conference treasurer rather than directly to the Home Missions Committee), \$650.00 was contributed by the General Conference, \$1,688.83 from fifteen Eastern District congregations and the remaining \$1,112.70 was contributed by individuals or conference auxiliaries (Sunday School Union, Y.P.U., etc.). Four conference families made personal contributions. One of these families was Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Stauffer who contributed \$500.00. Mr. Stauffer, an operator of a food and general merchandise store in Dublin, Pa., was a member of the Home Missions Committee. With this splendid support the lots were paid for as hoped.

### **THE SANTEE CHAPEL YEARS, 1946-1952**

Now that a building site was selected and purchased, what was the status of pastoral leadership? As mentioned earlier, Rev. Don Smucker had served the Fellowship at various times during the Winter and Spring of 1945-46. The Home Missions Committee had consulted with him about the possibility of his giving more permanent leadership to the Lancaster Fellowship. It was announced by the Home Missions Committee at the May 1946 Conference sessions

that they had extended a call to Rev. Don Smucker and that he had given his word of acceptance. It was agreed that "Sunday, May 26th at 3:30 P.M. shall be the day when Bro. Smucker takes over the work."

The preceding Friday, May 24, the Home Missions Committee had arranged to meet with the local committee and several other active members of the Fellowship. The presence of the following people at the committee meeting gives some indication as to who was participating in the Fellowship. They were Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Wenger, Elmer Ediger, Mr. and Mrs. William Snyder, Henry H. Rosenfeld, Orrie Baer, Leonard Gaeddert, D. C. Frost, and Rev. Smucker. It was reported by Dr. Frost that the Fellowship meetings could be held in the Theological Seminary chapel for the summer months.<sup>4</sup> The Home Missions Committee agreed to pay Rev. Smucker \$100.00 as salary and \$40.00 traveling expenses per month as he commuted from Princeton to Lancaster each weekend.

Sunday, June 23, 1946, is one of the more important dates associated with the history of the Lancaster Fellowship. Several firsts occurred that day. This was both the first worship service to be held on a Sunday morning, and it was also the beginning of regular weekly services. In addition to that, their first pastor, Rev. Donovan Smucker, was officially installed as pastor and a Sunday School was organized. An interesting write-up of the day by Rev. Freeman Swartz was published in the October 22, 1946 issue of *The Menonite*. He described it as follows:

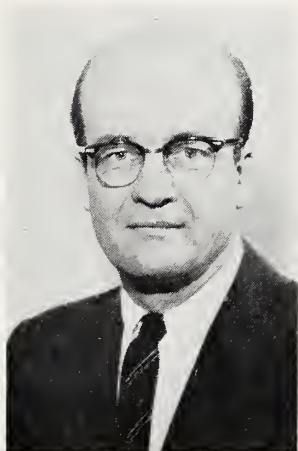
"On Sunday, June 23, 1946, a morning service was inaugurated in the Lancaster Community. It was held in the Santee Chapel on the campus of the Reformed and Evangelical Seminary. There were eighty-five persons present. The sermon for the occasion was preached by Rev. Don Smucker. He was introduced by Rev. Freeman H. Swartz, Chairman of the Home Mission and Church Extension Committee of The Eastern District Conference, as the designated pastor to lead the work in Lancaster City.

Previous to the morning meeting, a Sunday School had been formed. There were sixty-five present. This group was divided into three classes—one for the adults, one for the girls, and one for the boys. Mr. William Snyder, MCC office, Akron, was selected as the superintendent. Mr. Orrie Baer and Mr. Elmer Wenger, had previously been selected by the Fellowship to serve as secretary and treasurer."

The major steps toward the establishment of a congregation

<sup>4</sup> The Rev. Dr. David Dunn, Dean of the Seminary, is supposed to have stated that the Seminary would be happy to permit the Fellowship to use its chapel, as one way of compensating for the Anabaptist persecutions carried out by their group, the followers of Zwingli in Switzerland in the sixteenth century.





**Rev. Donovan E. Smucker**  
(1969 photo)



**Mrs. Barbara Smucker**  
(1969 photo)

were now well underway. However, as early as August of 1946, the records indicate that there were some second thoughts about erecting a church building in the Grandview section. This was just seven months after the lots were purchased and the ink was hardly dry on the final settlement papers. This is so because the possibility of purchasing the Calvary Independent Church on Duke Street in Lancaster was discussed by the Home Missions Committee. This committee decided to encourage the local committee to get facts and detailed information regarding a possible purchase option on the Calvary Independent Church. As to how seriously the local committee negotiated with the Calvary Church is not known. It is known, however, that this was not the only period when consideration was given to the Calvary Church as a possible permanent location for the congregation. As will be mentioned later, inquiries and negotiations were conducted on and off between the Fellowship and the Calvary Church for several years until April of 1950.

Establishing a congregation is not a simple task. However, things were moving along quite well. The Seminary agreed to permit the Fellowship to continue to use its facilities beyond the summer months, and it was evident that the committee had made a good choice in the selection of Don Smucker as pastor. By the end of September, after serving the Fellowship four months, Pastor Smucker was able to report that the attendance was rather well stabilized, that the group was in good grace with the Seminary, that cottage prayer meetings were being held, and that Andrew Shelly, a pastor in Kitchener, Ontario had conducted a series of meetings on September 29. He also discussed with them, in the afternoon, the organizational structure of his church.

What pattern to adopt for its organizational structure became

the major concern of the Fellowship during the fall of 1946. It was definitely decided on October 26 that a church should be organized and that a list of charter members be prepared. Constitutions of various churches in the Eastern District served as a basis for study. Ideas were discussed and exchanged on several occasions regarding the contents of a constitution. Finally on Sunday, January 26, 1947, the Fellowship adopted its first constitution. It called for a rather simple structure with a pastor, two deacons, three trustees, one of whom should be the treasurer, and a secretary. These with the Sunday School Superintendent comprised the Church Council. This constitution served the group until it was revised on May 25, 1952.

To implement the approved organizational structure the group held another congregational meeting two weeks later on February 9. Much was accomplished at this meeting. From penned-in notations on a copy of the proposed constitution it appears that approximately thirty persons participated in the February 9 meeting. One of the decisions which needed to be decided was a name for the congregation. As many as eleven names had evidently been submitted for a vote. The results of the vote were: Bethel, 7 votes; Bethany, 5 votes; Grace Evangelical, 5 votes; and Faith, Good Samaritan, and St. Paul, each receiving 4 votes. Leonard Gaeddert and Elmer Wenger were elected as the first deacons. Since the congregational records are not available for 1947 it is believed that Clyde Eshelman, Henry Rosenfeld, and Daniel Frost were the first trustees. Orie Baer, the first Secretary, and William Snyder, the first Sunday School Superintendent completed the composition of the first Church Council. On March 16, Rev. Freeman Swartz assisted the pastor, Don Smucker, in the ordination of the deacons and the installation of the new church officers.

Even though Pastor Smucker was only available on weekends, it was possible for him to instruct a group of young people enrolled in a catechetical class. On Palm Sunday, March 30, 1947, the eight members of this class were baptised by Pastor Smucker and given the recognition of being charter members of the congregation. The eight members of the class were: Miriam, Velda, and Guy Eshelman; Mary, Anna, and Henry Rosenfeld; Ruth Rohrer; and Carl Yoder. Also highlighting the Easter season, the first communion service for the congregation was held on Maundy Thursday night, April 3.

The date for the closing of the charter membership remains uncertain. The February 25, 1947 issue of **The Mennonite** states that the charter membership roll will be held open until the congregation's first communion service. There seems to be a discrepancy in the records. The statistics table in the May 1947 **Official Proceedings of The Eastern District Conference** lists Bethel as having 36 members and a Sunday School enrollment of 55. The **Official Minutes and Reports of The General Conference**, held in August of 1947, state in the report of the Board of Home Missions that the

Bethel Church has 36 charter members up to May 24. In the same report for statistics of Mission churches, Bethel is listed as having 39 members.

In March of 1947, a young people's group with 15 members was organized. Cottage or house prayer groups were mentioned earlier. These prayer groups usually met every Wednesday evening with Rev. Elmer Hess, a resident of Lancaster, but pastor of the Denver congregation, leading the group during the winter of 1946-47 in Bible study and prayer.

The congregation was most thankful for the privilege of having a place to worship on a regular basis. There was, however, a strong desire on the members' part to have their own place of worship. Most of them felt out of their element in the Santee Chapel. As Rev. Smucker phrased it so well during his pastorate, "the high churchly splendor of the chapel has a certain repulsion to plain people who visit the meetings." Without a doubt, the rent on the chapel of \$20.00 per Sunday had an affect on their desire for their own place of worship. By January of 1947, it became clear that there was little support for erecting a building on the Grandview lots. The Home Missions Committee expressed a willingness to dispose of the Grandview site and to further assist in the purchase of another location.

Since Rev. Smucker was completing his studies for a Bachelor of Divinity degree at the Princeton Seminary, it was not too surprising that he would be considered for other major responsible positions within the General Conference. The Mennonite Biblical Seminary, then located in Chicago, invited him to join their faculty as Professor of Biblical Theology. It was announced at the May 1947 Eastern District Conference that Rev. Smucker had accepted the call from the Seminary. It was, however, agreed that he would continue as pastor at Bethel until August 1, 1947. During these same 1947 conference sessions, the Bethel congregation was accepted into the membership of the conference. Several months later, on the afternoon of August 21, the Bethel Mennonite Church was officially received into the membership of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America at their conference sessions which were held in Berne, Indiana.

Both the Eastern District Conference and the General Conference continued to budget rather liberally toward the financial support of the Bethel congregation. The Home Missions Committee budgeted \$1,200.00 for the 1947-1948 year and the General Conference was committed to \$50.00 per month. These funds were, of course, in addition to offerings received from the congregation itself. It is fairly well established that the two conferences paid for the support of the pastor while the congregation paid the running expenses, such as rent, supplies, etc. Back in January of 1947 Don Smucker asked the Home Missions Committee what financial obligation was expected of the local people. It was suggested that they



be invited to contribute whatever they feel able towards the Lancaster work.

During the summer of 1947, the Home Missions Committee met on several occasions with the Bethel Church Council. Future leadership for the church was again the major item of discussion. The Home Missions Committee never seemed to let much grass grow under their feet. At their meeting on May 9 the Committee was informed that "many of the Bethel members feel that Rev. Abe Wiebe, now working for MCC at Akron, Pa., is a God sent man for them." At a meeting on June 6, the Deacons reported that they had approached Rev. Abram Wiebe at MCC and that Rev. Wiebe seemed favorable to the possibility but was concerned about his MCC commitments. The group was informed that Bro. Wiebe was a former member of the Evangelical Brethren Church but later joined the



Santee Chapel at the Lancaster Theological Seminary. The congregation met here from June 1946 to April 1952.

Bethel Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake, Minn. It was in that church where Bro. Wiebe was ordained by Rev. Erland Waltner and Rev. A. E. Kreider. An understanding with MCC was arranged whereby Abe Wiebe would work half-time for Menno Travel Service while serving the Bethel Church on a part-time basis. The exact date when Rev. Wiebe assumed pastoral responsibilities is not known. Since the August 1947 General Conference reports state that Rev. Smucker has left the field as of August 1st and that they are looking for a new leader, it can be assumed that Rev. Wiebe did not become the pastor immediately upon Smucker's leaving. It is, however, believed that Rev. Wiebe took charge of the work during the month of September. This is so because at the September 29 meeting of the Home Missions Committee Rev. Neuenschwander reported on a visit he had with Wiebe at MCC at which time Wiebe gave a report on the work at Bethel.

Some of the items reported at this time were that the attendance is slowly increasing, the average attendance in Sunday School is 60, and "there are new folks coming in right along and look us over." It was also reported that Bethel was searching for a suitable lot. The lots which were currently owned in the Grandview section were not regarded as too good a location, since another church had started to build fairly close to Bethel's lots, while still another church was planning to locate in that community. Even though it is not mentioned, it is rather obvious that the congregation seemed to prefer a location on the western side of the city rather than the eastern side. The congregation, during the next few years, considered several possible sites on the west side. At this same September 29 committee meeting it was reported that good sized lots, about one-half mile west of the Hamilton Watch Company, were available for \$6,000.00. These lots were big enough for both a church building and a parsonage as well as for some parking space. (It is believed that these lots were in the vicinity of where the First Church of Christ Scientist is located on Columbia Avenue.) No action, at least during this period, was taken on this possible site. The Home Mission Committee had adopted a very flexible attitude concerning a possible location. They were agreeable to either building a new church, or of buying an existing building. This decision, as well as the location, was largely up to the local congregation.

Even though Don Smucker's term as pastor was just a little over a year, much was accomplished during that period of time. Some very interesting reflections by Smucker were published in the September 16, 1947 issue of **The Mennonite**. The article is titled "Farewell to Bethel of Lancaster." The following is part of what he had to say:

"What is the secret of the missionary's joy? Surely one of the greatest factors is the relationship to new congregations. This brings a kind of primitive apostolic fervor which is a unique experience of the soul. Like the excite-

ment of a precious baby coming to this earth, the formation of a new church is a stirring event.

I thank God that I have had this type of experience in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Before my coming for the first time in March of 1945 other Christian brothers had caught the vision. Upon my arrival the sentiment mounted for regular weekly meetings, for the organization of a Sunday School and, of course, a church itself. As a commuter from Princeton, New Jersey, I did not have unlimited time for these developing church matters. Yet the time was "ripe" for decisive action. And when the Reformed Theological Seminary permitted us to use their beautiful (but somewhat too ornate!) sanctuary the time had really come.

For thirteen months thereafter I had the apostolic joy of assisting in the formation of the church. One by one the basic steps were taken: Sunday School, a church constitution, charter members, election of officials and ordination of deacons, a youth group, affiliation with the Eastern District and General Conference and, above all, a prayer meeting and Bible study. The latter development is one of the best I have ever known. All of the families come as families; children and adults participate in the Bible study; the attendance is close to about 90 per cent of the membership. This is the real center of power for Bethel!

What a joy it was to preach the Gospel to Bethel. I still believe that preaching is the foremost privilege of the New Testament Christian. Proclaiming the Living Word of God to folks who are starved for the riches of grace rather than the husks of the law. How I pray that the foundation of Bethel is sound Biblical rock, yea, even the Lordship of Christ Himself. How I pray that a vision of a Pentecostal church has been left there for future years."

During the next year or so things were moving along quite smoothly. Some of the major questions had been settled. They now had an opportunity to think about other concerns, in addition to the ever-present location question. The Church Council was meeting regularly, approximately once a month. One of the concerns was that of the extension of the church's program to reach others outside the church. The two main general questions were: "Who shall we attempt to reach?" and "How shall we reach them?" It was generally agreed that the best approach to bringing persons into the church would be through neighborhood contacts and personal work by the membership. In the case of recent Mennonite immigrants, effort should be made to have members of similar background extend an invitation to them. The Council also felt that special programs such as evangelistic services, choir programs, and gospel team presentations would bring interested people into the church where a friendly reception might encourage them to affiliate with the church.



Every congregation needs a special activity or event occasionally to add a new dimension to the normal routines. Recognizing the value of having their pastor to be an elder, the congregation arranged a special ordination service for May 30, 1948 at which time Abe Wiebe was ordained to the eldership of the Bethel Church. Guest elders, Erland Waltner, J. J. Plenert, and Walter McDowell, helped to make the service inspirational and challenging. The congregation also showed an interest in having fellowship with other congregations. On June 5, the congregation was host to the Lancaster County General Conference union picnic. This included the two congregations of Denver and Bowmansville. It would be interesting to know how many such picnics were held by these congregations.

The major development during 1948 was the Church Council's May 5th decision on the location of the church. They agreed that the Grandview lots should no longer be held as a possible building site for the Bethel Church, and so informed the Home Missions Committee of their convictions. At their June 17 meeting the Home Missions Committee acknowledged receipt of this information. They endorsed the idea of selling the lots and agreed to ask the Conference Executive Committee to proceed with their sale. The Conference evidently did not waste much time but immediately put the lots into the hands of a Lancaster Realtor who by October received an offer of \$4,000.00 for them. Feeling that they were worth at least \$4,500.00, the Conference decided to decline the offer. (These lots had been bought two and one-half years earlier for \$3,000.00.)

The Church Council had also decided at the May 5 meeting that a local building fund should be established. By the end of the year \$676.40 had been received for this fund.

Where should the congregation establish itself now that a rather final decision concerning the Grandview lots had been made? To get some action on this question, the Council in November of 1948, appointed a Survey Committee to determine the requirements of the congregation and to gain some idea of the financial possibilities for meeting the need. The five member committee was composed of the three trustees, Clyde Eshelman, George Korte, and Henry H. Rosenfeld, plus Jacob Good and Elmer Wenger as representatives of the congregation. Just how active this committee was during the next few months through the summer of 1949 is not known. The congregation did, however, continue to schedule quarterly offerings for a new church building.

By 1949, almost two full years as an organized congregation, and by which time the members had sufficient time to learn one another on a more intimate basis it is not surprising that differences of opinion would begin to emerge. The specific differences are not spelled out. Perhaps it is best that way. It is known however that two of the leaders of the congregation became inactive and dropped out of the fellowship. By April, the Sunday School Superintendent, Paul Burkholder, and his family had left and in June it was reported

that Dr. D. C. Frost and his family had left to unite with a Presbyterian Church.

As was recorded earlier, Rev. Abe Wiebe was serving on a part-time basis. During 1949, some concerns were expressed for having a full time pastor. Some of the members felt that more time was needed to be given to the church if it was to grow. It was also felt that insufficient time was being given to visiting both the members and prospective members. These concerns were expressed very openly by the pastor, the Church Council, and the Home Missions Committee in a joint meeting on June 10. The pastor reported at this meeting that a catechism class was being instructed; that the attendance in Sunday School ranges from 55 to 65; that the church membership is 53; that there is an active young people's group; and that prayer meetings are held every two weeks in different homes with an attendance of 35 to 40.

Pastor Wiebe recognized that the church was in need of more pastoral work. He felt because of his MCC work commitments that he could not give additional time to the church. He further reported that he was giving about eighty percent of his time to MCC. He evidently had a real burden for the church and had been thinking a great deal about his pastoral assignment. He recognized the lack of visitation and stated that he found it hard to visit people. He further stated that he and his wife had prayerfully thought about his ministry and they felt that they would like to be released from the church, if possible by sometime in September. They would remain with MCC, hold their membership with the Bethel Church, and give all their support and service for the church that they could.

This desire on the part of Rev. Wiebe was undoubtedly most unexpected. The congregation was not prepared to accept his resignation. Instead, during the next few weeks and months he was encouraged to re-consider and if possible to become their full time pastor. The Home Missions Committee concurred with these feelings and indicated that in all probability their committee would support, financially, a full time pastor. During a Sunday morning worship service, probably July 17 or 24, Pastor Wiebe announced to the congregation that if the Church Council desired to have him continue to serve as pastor he would be willing to do so. He further expressed a willingness to serve on a full time basis hopefully by the end of the year. The Council reacted favorably to Rev. Wiebe's expression and encouraged him in the visitation part of the ministry. The Council's action was endorsed by the congregation on Sunday, August 14. Sensing a responsibility to assist in the support of the pastor, rather than expecting additional support from the conference, the congregation decided to pay Bro. Wiebe \$100.00 per month which represented one half of his salary. Rev. Wiebe was able to terminate his MCC employment at a date earlier than anticipated thus enabling him to assume full time pastoral responsibilities on November 1.

Meanwhile, the survey, or building committee, was working on its assignment to find a suitable building site. The main item of discussion at the October 26, 1949 Council meeting concerned the possibility of purchasing the Calvary Independent Church Building on Duke Street at Frederick, in Lancaster. (This is the building now used by the First Baptist Church.) It was reported that the building was being offered for sale at \$45,000.00 but that possession would not be guaranteed before the end of a two year period. The Council agreed that the proposition should be presented to the members of the congregation to obtain their reaction. This was accomplished with the result that eighteen of the twenty family units who were consulted (there were only twenty-four family units at this time) considered the Calvary building suitable for the needs of the congregation and expressed a willingness to support its purchase. The Council, therefore unanimously agreed on November 23 that an offer of \$35,000.00 be made to the Calvary Church. The financing, or at least possible sources to finance such a venture had been thought through quite carefully. The amount designated for Lancaster by the Board of Home Missions from the sale of the Altoona Church was \$10,000.00; the sale value of the Grandview Heights lots was \$4,000.00; congregation's building fund had reached \$1,000.00; amount to be raised by the Bethel Congregation over the next two to five years was to be \$10,000.00; and a grant from the Board of Home Missions of \$10,000.00. Council records indicate that a meeting of the Council was held on December 8 (minutes of this meeting are not available). Other records indicate that the Council decided to offer \$30,000.00 rather than the \$35,000.00 originally agreed upon.

Real bargaining was now underway. The Calvary Church's response was a counter-offer of \$37,500.00. Evidently some second thoughts began to emerge. The Council upon further consideration recognized that Calvary's sanctuary needed painting and this, with other possible repairs, would cost in the neighborhood of \$2,000.00. It was, therefore, felt advisable to limit the next offer so that the estimated cost of painting and repairs would not exceed \$35,000.00. Consequently, it was agreed that Bethel's offer would be raised to \$33,000.00. The Council was informed on January 24, 1950 that the previous asking price of \$37,500.00 for the Calvary Church building would be retained. The Council was opposed to making another counter-offer to Calvary. Instead the Council at this same meeting was interested in having Henry Toews, who was present at the meeting, give them some construction costs for recently built churches in the community. At the March meeting the building committee was authorized to take definite action to determine approximate construction costs for a church building and to search for a suitable lot. Further discussion at the April meeting brought out the fact that the General Hospital had plans for expansion and that this would most likely affect the parking situation on Duke Street in the vicinity of the Calvary Church. It was further felt that a building, adequate for Bethel's foreseeable needs, could be erected for approxi-



mately \$35,000.00 to \$40,000.00. The Council, therefore, decided to withdraw the offer to Calvary.<sup>5</sup>

The Bethel congregation continued to receive adequate support from both the Eastern District and the General Conference. During the 1948-1949 year Bethel received a total of \$1,367.68 and during the 1949-1950 and 1950-1951 years they received \$600.00 from each conference or \$1,200.00 per year. These funds were designated for pastoral aid. Since the congregation was now in a position to help support the work of the Conference, a series of contributions were made. The 1948 Eastern District Conference Report lists a contribution from Bethel of \$81.50 for the Home Missions Committee; the 1949 report lists \$160.85; and the 1950 report lists \$147.65. They also met their District Conference budget commitments for these years. In 1948 it was \$54.00; in 1949 it was \$85.75; and in 1950 it was \$99.75.

Total receipts of the congregation during these years were as



**Rev. Abe M. Wiebe Family  
Abe, Marcella, and daughter, Carol Ann  
(Dec. 1947 photo)**

<sup>5</sup> The Calvary Independent Church on Duke Street was later sold to the First Baptist Church in April 1952 for \$40,000.00.

follows: \$3,208.89 in 1948, \$3,715.51 in 1949, and \$4,099.45 in 1950. These figures include offerings for both the Church and the Sunday School. They did not maintain separate treasuries at that time. Even though the giving was increasing from year to year so were the disbursements. During 1950, the Council was rather concerned that the treasury was slowly being depleted. To rectify the situation, various methods of cutting operation costs were proposed and adopted. The main item to cut was that of rental fees for the use of the Seminary chapel. The prayer meetings would again be held in the homes, thus eliminating the \$5.00 per meeting cost. It was also decided to deduct the chapel rent and janitor fee from the special offering received the first Sunday of each month. The rental fee for the use of the chapel was running between \$1,100.00 and \$1,200.00 each year.

During the remainder of 1950 (from Easter until Thanksgiving), the building committee was very active. The next task for the committee was that of studying sketches of various types of structures. They were thinking in terms of a structure approximately 40 feet by 50 feet with a square tower at one corner. The Council authorized the building committee to secure the services of an architect to draw up preliminary plans for this type of building. By April, the Council was also giving consideration to possible locations of building lots. Test votes were taken within the Council on these possible areas: Bausman, Grandview Heights, Harrisburg Pike, and Hambright. Hambright received all six votes. This vote, as early as April 29, 1950, is what really got the ball rolling in the direction of the Hambright location. At the June 29 meeting, the Council examined the architect's drawings and decided to submit the plans to five different contractors for estimates or bids. The bids were to be received by the first of August. The next day, the Council met to study and compare the bids received. What the exact bids were is not known. However, it was estimated that by including heat, light, water supply, excavation, etc., which were not part of the bids, the total would fall between \$45,000.00 and \$50,000.00. Knowing that this was more than the congregation could afford, they considered various alternatives. By eliminating the tower, shortening the length of the building, and substituting less expensive materials in various places, the cost could be reduced substantially. It was agreed that the \$35,000.00 originally decided upon still represented the absolute limit. The Home Missions Committee was also encouraging the congregation to keep the figure at \$35,000.00 unless they could secure a loan from the General Conference.

Now the congregation was getting rather anxious about a church building program. More and more they felt that the Santee Chapel was not meeting the needs of a church. The atmosphere was not conducive for the Mennonite type of worship, nor did it make growth possible.

During the fall and winter of 1950-1951 the thoughts of build-

ing were temporarily laid aside by other more important concerns. For some unknown reason several more of the active leaders had left the Fellowship. At the July 27, 1950, Council meeting the chairman read a letter of resignation from Elmer Wenger, one of the original deacons, which the Council regretfully accepted. Shortly after that Wenger's soon to be son-in-law, J. Richard Brubaker, who was serving as Secretary of the congregation also left the Fellowship. Pastor Wiebe was very much concerned about losing these men, as he was about other spiritual problems of the church. These included such concerns as problems between members, cooling of interest, and failure of some of the young people to support the youth organization. It was brought out that the promotion of more fellowship among members could be a very important means of solving these problems.

Concern for the congregation evidently weighed very heavily on Pastor and Mrs. Wiebe during the summer and early fall of 1950. A special meeting with representatives of the Home Missions Committee and the Church Council was called for October 4. It was at this meeting that Pastor Wiebe expressed his belief that a change of leadership for the Bethel congregation was needed. He indicated that the reason for submitting his resignation was not because of a lack of cooperation from the congregation, nor was it for financial reasons, nor had he accepted another position. The main reason expressed by Bro. Wiebe was that he never quite felt in his own heart that the pastorate was what he should be doing. He did express an interest in doing some definite Christian service for the Conference. Following a discussion concerning this unexpected move, the group asked Wiebe to share some of the qualifications he sees for future leadership. Since it seemed to be the sincere wish of Bro. Wiebe, the Council accepted Bro. Wiebe's resignation on the customary three months notice with the understanding that the church and Home Missions Committee would seek a replacement. Since Rev. J. J. Plenert of the Home Missions Committee was present at this meeting, it was logical that the question of a possible replacement should be raised so soon. Interestingly enough, the name of Ward Shelly of Coopersburg was mentioned by Bro. Plenert as a candidate to be considered. The Council agreed to send a letter to all of the members calling for a congregational meeting for Sunday, November 5, at which time Rev. Wiebe's resignation would be discussed and questions answered.

William Snyder, Chairman of the Council, in his letter to the congregation expressed quite well the feelings of the congregation when he said: "Many of us would not share Bro. Wiebe's viewpoint that his place of service is not in the pastorate. We have appreciated his efforts in behalf of Bethel congregation and I believe his resignation will come as a disappointment to many . . . and we believe this transition can be a forward step for the congregation if all of us seek God's will individually and as a group."



During the last few months of Bro. Wiebe's pastorate, he desired to serve only on a half time basis since he was employed part-time at Farmers Supply Co. in Lancaster. The Wiebe family officially ended its pastoral ministry at Bethel on January 15, 1951 with their last worship service on January 14. Shortly thereafter they moved to Newton, Kansas where Abe was employed as Business Manager of the General Conference Board of Education and Publication and Manager of the Mennonite Publication Office.

The Council and the congregation were once again faced with two major decisions, leadership and location. The Council was giving careful consideration to the Home Missions Committee's suggestion of calling Ward Shelly to be the new pastor. At the December 19 council meeting, it was agreed that Ward Shelly should come to Lancaster on Sunday, January 7 for purposes of meeting the congregation and to lead the worship service. January 7 was also the date of the annual congregational meeting. It was decided to postpone until a later date the question of extending a call to Rev. Shelly. In order that the congregation would have additional opportunity to learn to know Rev. Shelly, it was decided that he should be invited to come to Lancaster on the evening of Wednesday, January 24, to have charge of the prayer meeting and of a period for fellowship. On Sunday, February 4, another congregational meeting was held at which time the congregation voted almost unanimously in favor of extending a call to Rev. Ward Shelly. The Shelly family responded affirmatively with the understanding that it would be several months before they could assume the work. During the next several months, therefore, various conference pastors, as well as members of the MCC staff, and others conducted the Sunday morning worship services.

In addition to the deacons, Leonard Gaeddert and Elmer Wenger, those serving on the Church Council during the Santee years were: Clyde Eshelman, Henry H. Rosenfeld, D. C. Frost, Orie Baer, George Korte, Elmer Ediger, Raymond Harnly, Richard Brubaker, Jacob Good, and Arthur Voth. Serving as Sunday School Superintendent during these years were William Snyder and Paul Burkholder.

### **A NEW BUILDING . . . A NEW DECADE, 1952 - 1959**

As had been reported earlier, the congregation had been paying one half of Rev. Wiebe's salary during the period when he was employed on a full time basis. Because this was almost more than the congregation could handle, the Home Missions Committee agreed to pay half of Rev. Shelly's salary with the other half being paid by the Board of Home Missions. The congregation agreed to be responsible for the pastor's housing. Jacob Good, one of the trustees, solved this problem very nicely by offering the house he had recently purchased at 1760 Columbia Avenue as a parsonage for the Shelly's at \$60.00 per month.

You may recall that back in 1945 the council met with Rev. Rutt and other members of the Berean Fellowship for purposes of discussing a possible merger of the two groups. During the early part of 1951, the Council had the opportunity of meeting with several members of the Faith Calvary church who held their services in a school house near Letort. This was an independent congregation which had been meeting since 1946, after breaking off from the United Brethren Church. The purpose of this meeting was simply to become acquainted, to see what the groups had in common, and to explore ways in which the two groups could "get together." The Council felt that any union of the two congregations would have to take place over a period of time, and that it would have to be through the moving of the Spirit from within and not through any urging or compulsion from without. As far as is known, there were only a few contacts ever made with the Faith Calvary group and the question was dropped. This is the congregation which is now located on the Millersville Pike in Bausman.

During these months, building prospects were almost at a standstill, although the Council still seemed interested in the Hambright building project west of Lancaster. It was reported that one lot was being reserved for a church and the building committee was instructed to inform the manager of the project that Bethel was interested in this location but that a definite decision would be delayed until after the arrival of Rev. Shelly.

The Shelly family moved into its new residence on Columbia Avenue the last week in May. It was on Wednesday evening, May 30, that they first entered into the activities of the congregation when they attended the Bible study and prayer service conducted by Deacon Leonard Gaeddert in the Clyde Eshelman home. The big day was Sunday afternoon, June 3, when Bro. Shelly was officially installed as pastor of the congregation.

By July, the Council was again thinking seriously about building and had looked further into the Hambright project as a possible location. They were also concerned about the fact that the Grandview lots were still not sold. On September 10, a special meeting of the Council was held to consider whether they should proceed with church building plans. There didn't seem to be much doubt about that and in order to keep the project moving along, it was decided to have a congregational meeting on September 30, at which time the congregation would be asked to consider for approval the following recommendations of which they would be advised by letter:

- "(1) The acquiring of a lot and as soon as possible begin the construction of a church in the Hambright area with alternate locations for consideration being a site on the old Harrisburg Pike and the Grandview Heights site.

- (2) The building be of a simple colonial type with the total cost within \$35,000.00 to \$45,000.00 if possible.
- (3) The Council appoint a building committee to take definite steps toward carrying forward the planning and construction of the building."

The three locations were listed as follows:

"First choice: One and one-half blocks south of Lincoln Highway West and about one-half block east of Millersville Road. Alternate locations: (1) On extreme west end of Ross Street, one-half block west of President Avenue and about one or one and one-half blocks south of Old Harrisburg Pike. (2) Corner of Skyline Drive and Oregon Boulevard in Grandview Heights."

The congregation met on Sunday, September 30 and balloted on the recommendation of the Council as it concerned proceeding with building plans at this time. A total of 24 voted "yes," 4 "no" and 2 ballots were blank. On the ballot to determine where to locate the building, a total of 24 favored the Hambright location, 7 the location near the Old Harrisburg Pike, and none the Grandview Heights lots. At the October 2 Council meeting the following were nominated and approved for membership on the building committee: Jacob Good, Jacob Harnly, David Wenger, Clyde Eshelman, Henry H. Rosenfeld,<sup>6</sup> and Arthur Voth, with Rev. Shelly an ex-officio member.

The first order of business was to purchase the lot. At the October 9th meeting, the Council authorized the building committee to immediately negotiate for the purchase of the lot in the Manor Ridge Development (Hambright and Manor Ridge are synonymous terms) set aside for a church, and to proceed with the purchase of the lot, if in the judgment of the committee, the terms of the sale are favorable. On October 12, or within three days the lot was purchased for \$4,000.00. Jacob Habecker was selected to be the contractor and excavation was begun the last week in October. The Council also made plans for a visitation program among the membership for purposes of securing contributions for the building fund. This is almost beyond belief but, by early December, the construction of the building was well underway; the brick was about one-third laid; the contract was let for the heating system; the Grandview Heights lot had been sold for a net price of \$4,000.00; and good progress was being made at securing a loan from a local bank. What a wonderful way to end a year!

The first months of 1952 were indeed busy. The congregation must have been at high pitch. Their long awaited dream was now being fulfilled. Even during the winter months, the construction

<sup>6</sup> Henry H. Rosenfeld resigned from the committee in January 1952.



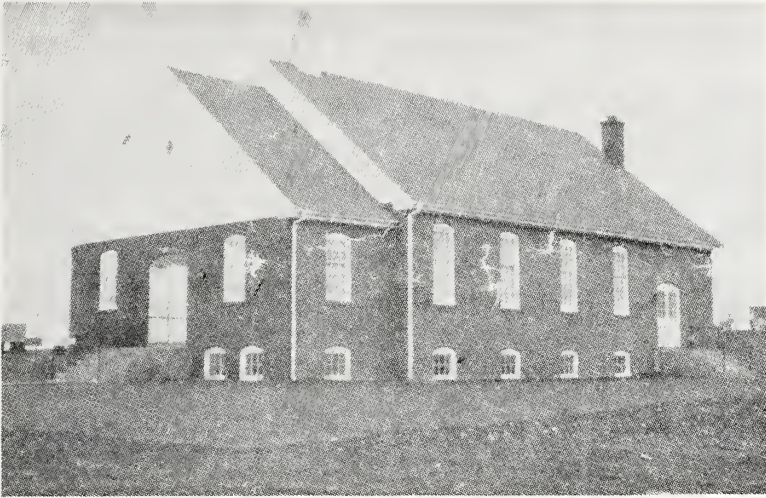
moved right along. The building committee met quite frequently in addition to the regular Council meetings. As a matter of fact, the very first official meeting to be held in the new house of worship was a meeting of the building committee on February 20, 1952. Not only was a building being built but the members were now enjoying fellowship in a way some had never before experienced. This was through the medium of voluntary labor. The exact number of persons who contributed their time and the total number of hours given will never be known. At the annual meeting in January 1952, Pastor Shelly expressed amazement at the great amount of donated labor. He was inclined to believe that, by the time the church is completed, the amount of donated labor would approach the two thousand dollar figure. This was exceptional for so small a group. In addition to this, there were MCC-VS men who were helping in the construction. Since these men were VSers, they were reimbursed for their travel costs from Akron (this was \$1.50 per trip). In addition to volunteering their labor, the members also donated material and furnishings.

The first Sunday morning service in the new building was held on April 27, 1952. The first congregational meeting in the new building was held four days earlier, on April 23, when the congregation met for a prayer service and for considering the adoption of a revised constitution. The building was now almost completed. The sidewalk to Manor Ridge Drive was not yet laid and the parking facilities were not completed, but otherwise the building was ready to be dedicated on May 11, 1952.

The three o'clock dedication service was held in the presence of an audience of 400. A write-up in the summer 1952 issue of **The Messenger** records very well the dedication program.

"The service was opened with the congregation singing. "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty." Rev. Elmer Hess read a devotional passage from Eph. 2 and offered prayer. The Male Quartet of the Denver Church rendered a selection and the local choir sang, "Christ Is Our Cornerstone." The act of dedication was performed by Rev. Wilmer Shelly and the prayer of dedication was offered by Rev. Freeman Swartz. Rev. J. J. Plenert gave the dedication address basing his remarks on II Chronicles 7:22. Rev. Walter Dick, using Matt. 21:13 and Jer. 7:11, challenged the congregation to make the building a house of prayer. About twenty ministers of the conference and of other groups were present."

Constructing a church is like many other things in life. Enjoy now, pay later. Actually, by the time the church was dedicated it was more than half paid for. The cost of the lot, building, insurance, etc. amounted to \$35,182.95. The furniture and fixtures amounted to \$3,728.34 making a grand total of \$38,911.29. Receipts up to the



**Bethel Mennonite Church Sanctuary as it appeared at the time of dedication in May 1952.**

time of the final building fund statement on August 15 were \$6,586.42 which included the balance in the building fund prior to October of 1951 as well as contributions received from the building fund drive and several special congregational offerings. In addition to this, they received, as gifts, \$10,000.00 from the Board of Home Missions from the sale of the Altoona Church and \$4,000.00 from the sale of the Grandview lots. These contributions and gifts amounted to \$20,586.24. The remaining debt was financed by a \$5,000.00 loan from the Board of Home Missions which was a loan for three years without interest. There was also a \$13,500.00 mortgage secured from the Fulton National Bank at 4% interest. This latter mortgage had to be authorized by the congregation at a special congregational meeting on May 25. It had not been possible to secure a mortgage before the building was completed. During the period of construction, several members made short-term interest free loans. By the end of 1952, \$1,000.00 had been paid on the mortgage leaving a debt of \$17,500.00.

During the same period, while the church was under construction, another important project was underway. This was the task of revising the constitution. As early as October of 1951, it became evident that now that the congregation was about to own property it would need to be incorporated and have a charter. To accomplish this, it was necessary that the constitution be revised. Rather than making only the required changes, it was decided to look at the document in its entirety. During the early months of 1952, the committee consisting of Shelly, Eshelman, and Voth worked on the revision. Several special council meetings were held for purposes of considering the recommended revisions. By April, the constitution

was ready for presentation to the congregation and a special congregational meeting was called for Wednesday evening, April 23. This was held following a special prayer service which was the first general meeting in the new meetinghouse. The constitution was unanimously approved. Unfortunately, this did not quite settle the matter, as Attorney Ralph Eby advised the Council that additional changes would still be necessary in either the constitution or the charter. The terminology in the two documents did not agree. On May 25th, the congregation once again approved unanimously changes in the constitution.

During the Santee Chapel days, the congregation was hampered by not being able to carry on a full church program. Before the congregation began to occupy the building, plans were underway to have a Daily Vacation Bible School. The school was held in the evening from June 9-20 with an enrollment of 115. Beginning on September 25, a Bible Club was started for the children from the nearby Hambright elementary school. It was held each Thursday afternoon at 3:15. Before the cold weather, the attendance averaged 60 and later the average was 45 to 50. These classes were held during a number of winters and were taught by members of the church as well as by women in the community. During the 1953-54 Fall term, the Bible Club was held on a released time basis during the last hour of school time. This resulted in an average attendance of 139.

It was always rather traditional for many churches, including the Mennonites, to have their own cemetery. In most cases, these were located in close proximity to the meetinghouse. Now that the Bethel congregation had a meetinghouse, the question of a cemetery for the congregation was raised. The Council discussed this at several of its meetings during the fall of 1952 and presented the following report at the January annual meeting:

- “(1) It would not be possible to purchase a plot adjoining the church or even within sight of it.
- (2) Several families already have lots in other cemeteries.
- (3) Since we are a small congregation, it would grow very slowly.”

The families were advised about the possibility of securing lots at the Millersville Mennonite Church, only two miles to the South.

The 1950's were, in many ways, what may be thought of as Bethel's golden years. After the erection of the building, these were years when no one particular event dominated the church program. They were the years when the congregation really found itself. There was for the most part good harmony and a sense of mission permeated the life of the congregation. The membership more than doubled during these years as did also the giving. Such growth does not happen automatically but is symbolic of spiritual growth and of



a Spirit led people. The entire church program was expanded and the congregation was, finally, better equipped to concentrate on the true business of The Church.

At the beginning of 1952, the membership stood at 65. The congregation experienced a remarkable rate of growth. By 1953, it was 76; by 1955, 106; by 1957, 127; by 1959, 144; and by 1961, 165. During the Santee Chapel years, the membership was composed primarily of persons with a General Conference Mennonite background (these would have been primarily the MCC people), former Lancaster Mennonite Conference members, as well as Mennonite immigrants from Germany and Russia. The lack of a church building was a deterrent to attracting persons with a non-Mennonite background. The congregation right from the beginning had a desire to have a strong witness in the Manor Ridge community. Here they conducted community surveys and visitation programs. The church has always been rather successful in enrolling a number of children from the community in its D.V.B.S. program as well as in the school related Bible Club. There has also been a degree of success in having these children attend Sunday School. Attracting the local people to come for worship, and to affiliate with the congregation, has always been more difficult. The church leaders felt this rather keenly. Pastor Shelly in his January 1956 annual report stated: "We need to remember the community in which we live. It is very unfortunate that none of our members lives within two miles of the church, except the pastor and family." Pastor Shelly did not suggest this but could one of the problems be that many Lancaster County people have an aversion to the name Mennonite?

It would be far from accurate, however, to imply that the membership was, and continues to be, composed entirely of persons with a Mennonite background. Following the 1956 report, various persons and families from the community did affiliate with the congregation. This, as well as through marriage, helped to bring a new dimension into the membership. Pastor Shelly pointed out in his 1958 report that "members have come to Bethel directly from the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, the Church of the Brethren, Church of God, Baptist, United Christian, Pentacostal, Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Russian Orthodox. While most of our membership is from the Lancaster area and several from Kansas and Ohio, a number of our members came to us from the Ukraine, Crimea, Danzig, Switzerland, Poland, Central Siberia, and Canada. What the Lord can accomplish with such a mixture of backgrounds has proved to be a blessed experience in fellowship."

There were many persons who assumed leadership responsibilities during this period. It is impossible to have as active a program as Bethel had without a large number of members being actively involved. During the early years, as well as during the fifties, and even up to the present, Mennonite Central Committee personnel have participated very actively in the church program. Not to mention

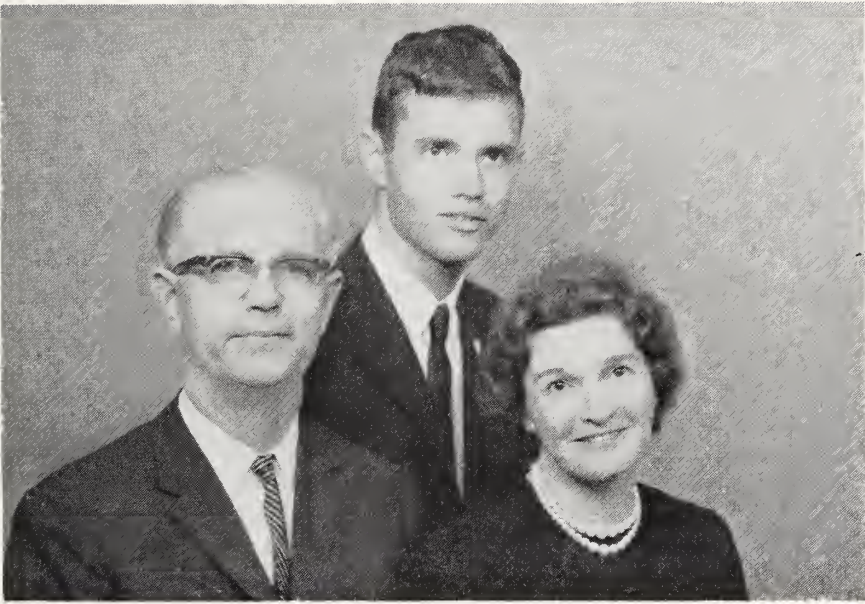


mize the contributions of the other members, it really goes without saying that the MCC people have had a good influence on the life and fellowship of the congregation. One hesitates to mention names but the William Snyder's, Delmar Stahly's, Arthur Voth's, Larry Kehler's, and Melvin Penner's would represent some of these persons. There were other MCC'ers who were particularly active in the music program. These would include the Gordon Dyck's, Merle Epp's, Jack Purves's, Vera Isaac, and Harvey Hiebert. Innumerable MCC voluntary service personnel shared actively in the program of the church.

The fifties had their share of personal problems and spiritual concerns. There were the inactive. Prayer and Bible study meetings, although very regular and active, had at times a relatively small percentage of members participating. In 1954, one of the Deacons, Jacob Good, and Clyde Eshelman, a trustee and treasurer from the beginning, dropped out of the fellowship.

Those who served as Deacons during these years were Leonard Gaeddert, Jacob Good, Arthur Voth, and Jacob Harnly. Others serving on the Church Council were: David Wenger, Henry H. Rosenfeld, Clyde Eshelman, Henry Berg, J. Lester Charles, William Snyder, James Jacobs, Henry Toews, Delmar Stahly, and John Swarr.

In addition to the growth in membership, there was also a solid growth in financial giving and stewardship. Following the erection of the building, the congregation had the challenge of paying off a debt of \$18,500.00. The Council worked vigorously at reducing this debt throughout the fifties. In addition to the interest, they were always able to pay at least \$1,500.00 and sometimes as high as \$2,500.00 per year on the principal. By January of 1960, all that remained was a debt of \$4,000.00. All through this period, their giving for the general expenses of the church and to various missions showed a steady increase. The 1952 constitution called for the preparation of an annual budget. Therefore, the very first budget adopted was for 1953. This first budget amounted to \$3,145.00. The building fund giving and expenditures were never included in the budget. As most budgets are, Bethel's also was higher from year to year. They did a good job of meeting their budgets. By 1956, it was \$3,560.00; in 1958, it was \$4,775.00; and for 1960, it was \$6,000.00. There is a reason for its doubling during this decade. From the very beginning, the Home Missions Committee and the Board of Home Missions were paying the pastor's support. This assistance was as much as \$2,400.00 per year for several years. With the exception of one year, 1950, the Conference paid the full amount until 1953, when the congregation contributed \$300.00 for this purpose. This was increased year by year to \$600.00, to \$900.00, to \$1,500.00, to \$2,100.00, to \$2,500.00 until the congregation assumed the complete salary, by 1960, of \$3,150.00. During these same years, the congregation was meeting its Eastern District Conference budget commitments and was giving quite liberally to General Conference missions, the Men-



**Rev. Ward W. Shelly Family  
Ward, Lydiamarie, and son, Thomas  
(1963 photo)**

nonite Biblical Seminary, Bluffton College, Mennonite Central Committee, as well as to other benevolences. These contributions grew from approximately \$1,000.00 to as high as \$3,500.00 per year.

Bethel first organized an aggressive Sunday School program in 1946. The improved facilities aided in its growth and outreach. Beginning with 1952, Jacob Harnly served continuously for eleven years as Superintendent. Jake did a most competent job, and has proven to be one of the most loved and respected laymen in the church. One must not overlook the many dedicated men and women who taught, and continue to teach, the various Sunday School classes. For Bethel, Sunday School was never the most wasted hour of the week. Its influence cannot be measured but it certainly had its impact on the spiritual health of the church in a very positive way. The annual Sunday School picnics were always a delight. They were held at various places, on the church grounds, Buchmiller Park, East Petersburg park, etc. A most enjoyable feature was the married versus the singles in softball.

Other active groups were the Youth Fellowship, Women's Missionary Society, and the Men's Brotherhood. The youth and the women were organized and active during the Santee Chapel days. The men were organized later having only organized in the mid-fifties. Some of the other special programs of the period were the



almost annual Evangelistic meetings and Bible Lectures. These meetings were frequently held for at least a week and were well received and attended. Some of the speakers were: Peter Dyck, Walter Dick, J. Herbert Fretz, William Detweiler, Robert Fritsch, Andrew Shelly, C. F. Derstine, Lawrence Burkholder, Wilmer Denlinger, William Dick, and J. J. Esau. The congregation placed much importance on evangelism. This is reflected in the list of special speakers, in the growth rate of the church, in its strong missionary emphasis, and in its Christian Education program. There was at one time an Evangelism Committee within the congregation. Remember the every-member prayer calendars?

Bethel has always had an appreciation for good church music. Fortunately, it has been blessed with many capable musicians, both vocal and instrumental. Very early groups or individuals would sing special numbers in the worship services. During the early fifties, there was special music almost every Sunday while a choir would sing on special occasions, such as during the Christmas season. A regular choir was participating in the worship service as early as 1953 under the leadership of J. Lester Charles. A junior choir was organized around 1954 which was directed for a number of years by Mrs. Ward Shelly. Other choristers or choir directors were Gordon Dyck, Harvey Hiebert, and Eric Habegger.

One of the best known doctrines of the Mennonite Church is its peace position. The congregation was encouraged to live and practice a peace witness. Since Bethel has been one of the congregations where MCC personnel worship, it is easy to understand why the peace position is given a strong emphasis. During the years, several young men have entered alternate or voluntary service in lieu of military service. Other young men have entered the regular military, some on a non-combatant basis.

Some of the other events of the fifties included the Shelly's constructing a new home at 2110 Birchwood Road, about two blocks south of the meetinghouse. They moved from Columbia Avenue into their new home on May 8, 1953. By the spring of 1954, the parking situation was becoming rather acute. On many occasions, when a need existed, one or more families would volunteer to contribute the cost. A parking area on the south side was added to the physical plant in this manner. Improvements in the landscaping of the church grounds was also encouraged at this time. Thanks to another member of the congregation, a plan for the planting of trees and shrubbery was undertaken.

An interesting resolution was presented at the 1958 annual meeting which the congregation approved: "Be it resolved that since we have paid approximately \$6,000.00 during the past ten years for parsonage rent at three or four different locations, that we as a congregation would welcome a memorial gift providing all or a substantial part of the cost for the erection of a parsonage on or adja-



cent to the present church lot." This was one of those items which seemed to have sprung out of nowhere and was probably soon forgotten. Remember the key words were "memorial gift" and since the resolution was never rescinded it is most likely that the offer would still be accepted.

An event, certainly worthy of mention, which was celebrated on Sunday, May 26, 1957, was the tenth anniversary of the congregation. Rev. Ellis Graber, pastor of the Zion Mennonite Church at Souderton and President of the Eastern District Conference, brought the message at the morning worship service.

## **YEARS OF PROGRESS AND TRANSITION, 1960-1965**

By the end of the decade, the congregation was giving consideration to such items as building expansion, constitution revision, and the installation of an organ. The Sunday School enrollment, just as the church membership, was experiencing a steady growth. There was a definite shortage of classroom space to carry on an adequate Christian education program. It was the awareness of this situation which prompted the congregation as early as the fall of 1958 to begin thinking about building expansion.

At the January 1959 meeting, the following motion was approved by the congregation: "It is moved that the congregation put a great deal of effort into retiring the church debt in 1959 and also encourage the Council to create a plan for the expansion of the building, including a time schedule, and bring it to the congregation for its reaction." At this point, the remaining indebtedness amounted to \$6,725.00. The Council worked diligently during 1959 at reducing the building debt by \$2,725.00 so that by January of 1960 there remained a \$4,000.00 debt. The Council also began to give some preliminary study to possible plans as to how the building might be expanded. Henry Toews, one of the trustees, prepared drawings of several suggested plans which he shared with the Council on several occasions during the year, and also with the congregation at their annual meeting in January of 1960. It was at this point that the Council was instructed to develop a plan to expand the church building costing approximately \$40,000.00 with an estimate of the amount required annually to amortize the cost. Upon completion of a plan, the congregation was to be further consulted about it as well as about the amortization plan.

On May 15, the Council presented a two step expansion plan to the congregation. After making several changes, the congregation approved the following:

- "Step 1. An extension of the present building to the south, 37 feet wide, not disturbing the auditorium until after
- Step 2, creating five temporary rooms back of the pulpit, with undivided basement. The extension shall be

36 to 40 feet long, at the discretion of the Council after further study.

Step 2. An eventual educational wing extending west at right angles to the south end of the building, of undeterminate width and length; the auditorium would then be extended to occupy the entire first floor of the first extension with the back part of the original auditorium partly taken up by an expanded nursery and cloak room area."

Several days later, a seven man building committee with Walter Horst, as chairman, and Henry Toews, as Vice Chairman was appointed. There was also a twelve man finance committee chaired at first by William Snyder and later by Leonard Gaeddert. During the fall months, the finance committee canvassed the membership for purposes of determining what financial support could be expected. The results looked very promising as \$16,195.00 was committed for a three year period. These results were shared with the congregation, at their January 1961 annual meeting, where it was agreed that an attempt be made to have one third of the finances in hand by early Fall with hopes that construction could be started by October 1.

The solicitation campaign covered three different projects in one package. One was the liquidation of the current debt which had been reduced to \$2,000.00 by the end of 1960. The second item was to pay for the cost of the sewers which were being installed in the Manor Ridge community at this time. The Bethel Church connected to the system during November at a cost of almost \$1,800.00. The third item was, of course, the new addition which was estimated to cost in the neighborhood of \$26,500.00. It was the goal of the building committee to keep the total cost of the three projects within \$30,000.00.

By July of 1961, the finance committee was recommending that the building committee move ahead in the Fall on step one of the approved construction. They realized that they would not have one third, or \$10,000.00, contributed by that date. The prospects were good that 25%, or at least \$7,500.00 would be available by October 1. The Council accepted this recommendation and the building committee began to make plans to get the project rolling. Several contractors were consulted for estimates, although the congregation was quite fortunate in having several of its own men in the construction field. Hans Peter Neufeld served as the general contractor, Henry N. Rosenfeld was the masonry contractor, and Henry Toews, with experience in major construction projects served in a supervisory and consultant capacity. The heating, electrical, plumbing, excavating, etc. were done by non-members of the congregation.

On Sunday morning, October 1, the congregation held a brief service on the church lawn following the worship service to officially

inaugurate the building program. Excavation for the addition had been undertaken the preceding week. It was almost exactly ten years earlier when the ground had been broken for the main church building. Construction progressed very nicely during the winter months. The target date for completion was April 1. This date was basically met with the Sunday School using the facilities by the last Sunday in March. Dedication of the extension was held on May 13, 1962, exactly ten years following the dedication of the sanctuary. Robert Landis, pastor of the Pine Grove congregation in Bowmansville, gave the dedicatory address.



**Bethel Mennonite Church. Sanctuary with the 1962 Christian Education Building. (1972 photo)**

The congregation responded admirably to the financial challenge. 1961 proved to be the best year ever for building fund receipts. During this year, a total of \$6,087.88 had been contributed. This was more than enough to pay off the old debt, the sewers, and a fair amount for the new construction. Total contributions in 1962 for the building fund amounted to \$4,902.77. This means that in two years time approximately \$11,000.00 was contributed for this purpose. During the construction period, it was necessary to borrow \$16,000.00 from the bank. However, by the end of 1962, the total indebtedness was reduced to \$13,400.00.

As early as November of 1959, the Council, recognizing that its responsibilities were growing along with the church, considered the advisability of increasing the size of the Council in order to broaden



the base of close interest and responsibility on the part of the congregation. Even though no action was taken at this point, the possibilities were evidently germinating in their minds. A year later, in December of 1960, the Council recommended that a constitutional revision committee be appointed. The main area of concern to the Council was a possible means of expanding the Council by addition of a third deacon and/or trustee. The congregation considered this on January 11 and gave its approval. In addition to Church Council members, the committee was to be composed of representatives appointed by the Sunday School and the auxiliary groups.

The committee began to function by April and met a total of eight times, until they completed their task in September. Leonard Gaeddert, the Sunday School representative, served as chairman of the committee. Others serving with him, in addition to the Council members, were Carol Burkhart, W.M.A. representative, Ross Witmer, Men's Brotherhood representative, and Rudy Sartschenko, the young people's representative. A special congregational meeting was called for November 17, 1961 for purposes of considering the committee's revisions. The committee was proposing a number of changes. One of the more important changes had to do with the membership, specifically with qualifications for admission to membership as well as criteria for terminating membership. The provision for associate membership was also incorporated into the constitution at this time. Possibly the most significant change called for a vote on the pastor's continuing service. This vote was to be taken every three years. The revisions also provided for broadening the membership on the Council. It provided that there shall be two or more deacons but not more than one for every fifty members and one or more deaconesses. It also provided for a Board of Trustees consisting of five members. All of these persons to be members of the Church Council.

The committee's work was not in vain as the congregation voted unanimously to accept the revised constitution. This, incidentally, is the same document under which the congregation operates today. As far as is known, it has not been further amended. Some of the revisions were put into effect at the annual meeting in January of 1962, when Walter Horst was elected as the third deacon to serve with Arthur Voth and Jacob Harnly. Jeannette Harnly was elected as the first deaconess for the congregation and the Board of Trustees was increased from three to five members. It had been decided that the first pastoral vote would be taken at the 1963 annual meeting. Since the required quorum of 50% of the members was not present, the election had to be postponed till February 3 when Pastor Shelly received a most favorable response from the congregation.

While worshipping in the Santee Chapel, the congregation was fortunate in having a fine organ available for use in its worship services. However, upon moving to Manor Ridge, the congregation was not in a position, financially, to afford an organ. On various occa-



sions, particularly for weddings, organs were brought in on a rental basis. Since these were primarily weekend occasions, it was not unusual for them to be available also for the worship services. There were members in the congregation who were desirous of having the congregation purchase an organ and even made offers of special gifts for its purchase. These sentiments were being expressed by the end of 1960. The Council was sympathetic with the desires but felt that undue attention to an organ at this time could undercut the building fund drive and delay the time of building. The Council, nevertheless, at the 1961 annual meeting presented a proposal that an organ selection committee of five members be appointed by the Council. This committee was to study the various makes and types of organs available for church use. Included in the proposal was the recommendation that the organ would be purchased when the amount of money in the organ fund reached the amount needed. The recommendation was approved and the Council appointed Lucille Snyder, Carol Burkhart, Ward Shelly, James Jacobs, and Walter Horst, who was asked to serve as chairman. Contributions for this purpose were very slow in coming in and hence very little was accomplished by the committee during this period. By January of 1962, there was \$354.00 in the organ fund.

During this period, the congregation was in the midst of its building program. Before the building project began, it was estimated that it would cost in the neighborhood of \$26,500.00. As the project was moving closer to completion, it appeared that the actual cost would be around \$20,000.00. Because of this, it was recommended that the price of an organ be incorporated into the building fund budget. However, it appears that this suggestion was not accepted by the Council. The result of this renewed interest prompted the organ committee to become more active in contacting organ manufacturers, visiting their studios, playing the instruments, etc. In January of 1963, the committee reported that it had considered at least five different instruments. By March of that year, the committee was recommending that a used Conn organ which was available for a limited time for \$1,650.00 be installed in the church on a trial basis. The Council agreed to this idea with the provision that the funds would be available within 90 days to pay for it, in case the organ proves satisfactory. A new Conn organ was installed for the same price as the used one during that month and, because of the good price reduction, as well as the fact that the committee itself was unable to agree on which organ to purchase, the Council agreed to its purchase.

In addition to the major concerns of this period, the normal church program was being carried out. The congregation was given the experience of having Grant Noll, a Gettysburg Seminarian, do his practical work as pastoral assistant to Ward Shelly. Grant served in this capacity during the 1961-62 school year. One of the projects Grant pursued while assisting at Bethel was a study of the congregation and the community.

During the building program of 1962, and for the next two years, the congregation was challenged to paying off the debt. Since many members had made three year pledges for this fund, they were making every effort to meet these commitments. The result of this emphasis had, however, an effect on receipts for the general fund. Beginning in 1962 and running through 1964, the general fund was constantly in the red, frequently by as much as \$800.00 to \$1,000.00. As one might expect, this situation was one of the major concerns of the Council. Feeling that the financial goals were realistic, the Council and the Men's Brotherhood sponsored several stewardship education programs. This was accomplished through the use of films, discussions, and workshops. To eliminate the competition for funds between the general fund and the building fund, it was proposed and approved, beginning with 1965, that the building fund be included in the general budget. For 1965 the amount included was \$2,000.00. This proved to be a realistic approach as this amount was met and exceeded by \$500.00. At the beginning of 1965, the indebtedness was \$10,500.00 and by the end of the year it was \$8,000.00.

Prior to the erection of the Christian Education Building, the congregation never had the privilege of hosting the annual sessions of the Eastern District Conference. Now with the additional classroom space and a fellowship room, the Council in September of 1962 accepted the Board of Deacons' recommendation that the Bethel Church invite the Conference to hold its May 1963 annual meeting in its church building. The Conference accepted the invitation and by early 1963, the Council was busily engaged in establishing the necessary committees to host the conference. Many members were involved in the planning and hosting of the conference through serving on various committees, such as housing, food, information, transportation, exhibits, and facilities, etc. This proved to be the highlight for 1963 as there was a general feeling that it was a very profitable and enjoyable experience.

The year 1964 proved to be a year of unhappy surprises. At the annual meeting, it was announced that Bro. Arthur Voth, a deacon since 1954, was submitting his resignation from that office. The congregation expressed extreme reluctance to accept the resignation because of his faithful and capable service, both as deacon and as Chairman of the congregation. The congregation felt so strongly about this that a committee was appointed to call on Bro. Arthur for purposes of receiving an explanation for his withdrawal from congregational activity and resignation as deacon. His reason seemed to be rather personal, one without animosity, but rather one of continuing love and concern on the part of the Voth family. Wishing to respect and honor Arthur's feelings, the Council decided in February to formally accept with regret his resignation. In order to fill the vacancy on the Board of Deacons, a special congregational meeting was called following the worship service on June 7, at which time Larry Kehler was elected to the office of deacon. Sunday, June 28 was both a day of joy and a day of sadness. On this

particular Sunday, Larry Kehler was installed as deacon, and Rev. Ward Shelly read his resignation as Bethel's pastor to accept the pastorate of the Calvary Mennonite Church of Washington, Illinois.

Pastor Shelly's resignation was indeed an unexpected surprise. That he had the love and respect of the congregation goes without saying. The majority of the membership united with the Bethel Church during his ministry. The more than thirteen years of Bro. Shelly's ministry were blessed with both numerical and spiritual growth. Probably the major attribute of Pastor Shelly was his gift for expressing and sharing a personal Christian interest in each member of the congregation. To express its warmth and appreciation for the Shelly's ministry, the congregation, on December 20, following the worship service, provided a farewell luncheon to honor them and to wish them God's speed in their new ministry. On Sunday, December 27, Brother Shelly ended his service at Bethel by having both a communion and a baptismal service.

On July 28, at the first Council meeting following Brother Shelly's resignation, the Council gave consideration to the procedures to be followed in filling the forthcoming pastoral vacancy. The church constitution called for the appointment of a ministerial committee when a vacancy occurred in the pastorate. Following some discussion on the size of the committee, it was agreed that the committee consist of the three deacons, Jacob Harnly, Walter Horst, and Larry Kehler, the deaconess, Jeanette Harnly, the Secretary, Delmar Stahly, and three other members, William Snyder, Ross Wimer, and Henry Toews. Brother Snyder was designated to serve as chairman of the committee.

The pulpit committee, as it was called, met a total of ten times during the last five months of 1964. The first meetings were devoted to considering the type of man to seek as pastor. They consulted with Rev. Arthur Rosenberger, chairman of the Eastern District Conference Ministerial Committee, to get the best counsel on how to proceed with their assigned task. Following the advice of Rev. Rosenberger, the pulpit committee considered one prospect at a time and, after prayerful consideration, they were, by the annual meeting on January 6, 1965, ready to recommend to the congregation that Floyd Bartel of Topeka, Kansas be called to serve Bethel Church as its pastor. This was not an unexpected recommendation from the pulpit committee as the Bartel's had participated in the worship services the previous weekend of January 3. Following a period of discussion, as well as a period of silent and audible prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the decision facing the congregation, a ballot vote was taken and the recommendation carried with only a few dissenting votes.

At the time of Pastor Shelly's resignation, it was hoped that a new pastor could be selected to assume pastoral responsibilities by the first of the year. This of course was not possible and the con-



gregation was advised that the Bartel family could not come before August 1 of 1965. During the interim period between the Shelly and Bartel pastorates, the congregation was served for several months by Rev. Wilmer Shelly, of Bluffton, Ohio, a former Eastern District pastor but now retired. Brother Wilmer served from the beginning of January through Easter Sunday, April 18. To serve as interim pastor during the remaining months, the Council had engaged Ernest Bohn, of Goshen, Indiana, also a retired and former Eastern District Conference pastor. Unfortunately, due to the April 11 Palm Sunday tornadoes in northern Indiana, which destroyed the homes of three of Rev. Bohn's children, it was not possible for Rev. Bohn to serve in this capacity. Rather various conference and community pastors served as the messenger for the worship services from mid April through July.

The arrival of a new pastor is always a much anticipated event. The congregation was not to be denied the opportunity of giving a warm welcome to the Bartel family. Before their arrival, the Council was making housing arrangements and thinking of ways in which the congregation could be of assistance to them. Two members of the congregation, Melvin Glick and Vernon Schroeder, drove in a Glick family truck to Topeka to pick up the pastor's household furnishings. Upon their arrival, the Bartel family was housed for several weeks in the Melvin Glick home while they searched for and purchased a home at 1937 Manor Ridge Drive, one and a half blocks east of the church. Pastor Bartel began his ministry at Bethel as planned on Sunday, August 1, 1965. Following the worship service on August 8, a reception was held in the fellowship room to officially welcome the Bartel's to their new pastorate. Other kindnesses by which the members expressed themselves during the next several weeks were through a food shower and assistance in the cleaning and the moving into their home on Manor Ridge Drive.

### **NEW RESPONSES FOR CHANGING TIMES, 1965-1972**

The American scene during the last half of the sixties was permeated with a certain amount of uncertainty and restlessness. The war in Viet Nam was causing anxiety. People from all walks of life were concerned about the American involvement in it. As a peace church the Mennonites reaffirmed their previous statements that war is sin and that one must commit himself to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. Viet Nam, as well as civil rights, poverty, affluence, justice, drugs, etc., just to mention a few, were some of the issues which called for a Christian response.

As a group of Christian believers, the members of Bethel also grappled with how they, individually and corporately, could best express themselves on these issues in a spirit of Christian love and discipleship. The members were challenged through sermons, Sunday School, discussion groups, as well as through **The Mennonite** and other conference publications to recognize that Christ was in-

terested in the whole man. At the same time the congregation maintained its interest in the more traditional methods of spreading the Gospel. Beginning with the fall of 1966, a Mission Emphasis or Evangelism series was held on an annual basis. Cottage prayer and Bible study groups met during the Lenten season, Holy Week services, family life series, as well as other special programs to help meet the spiritual needs of the fellowship were planned quite regularly.

The congregation, from its earliest days, had a very close relationship with the Eastern District Conference. For the first number of years Bethel was almost entirely on the receiving end. Through the years, Bethel has, in a remarkable way, been able to support the conference programs and institutions. Many of the children and young people have delightful memories of attending retreat at Camp Men-O-Lan during the summer months. This camping program has also received the support of the adults who have served as teachers, counselors, or kitchen assistants. The Missions Committee, Education and Publication Committee, Peace and Service Committee, Historical Committee, and the Germantown Corporation are some of the committees on which the members of the Bethel Church have had an opportunity to serve.

A recent survey of the congregation revealed that 23 of the members have attended one of the General Conference Mennonite institutions of higher learning. This would be either Bethel or Bluffton College. Some of these former students are employed in full time Christian service through the Mennonite Central Committee. A goodly number of the young people have accepted the challenge to serve in short and longer term voluntary service programs. Some have served overseas. The Don Ranck's are currently serving in Brazil under the Mennonite Central Committee. Other young people who have given their time and talents during the last several years have been: Reinhold Berg, Henry Kenn, Douglas Martin, Darlene and Clyde Ranck, Margaret and Sharon Snyder, Gregory and Jerold Stahly, John Swarr, and Frieda and Judith Toews. From the Fall of 1970 and into the summer of 1971, Nancy Charles served on a self supporting basis with the youth program, Dimension, in the city of Philadelphia.

The medium of radio and television have become the primary method of communication in today's society. The Christian church for years has been effectively using this medium as a means of spreading the Gospel. During 1969, the Bethel Church cooperated with several other local Mennonite congregations in sponsoring "Choice," a radio program aired over WLAN. Several Bethel families participated in the Shared Holiday Program whereby children from disadvantaged homes have an opportunity to spend a period of one or more weeks with another family. Here one has the opportunity to relate more personally in a Christian way to the needs and hopes of those in less fortunate circumstances.

Two events of major importance during 1971 were the establishment of house churches and the decision to renovate a home for a needy family. John Miller, during his Lenten series, shared his enthusiasm for "House Church" fellowships whereby several families meet on a regular basis for purposes of study, prayer, inspiration, sharing, and fellowship. A number of families, challenged by this concept of closer Christian community, organized themselves into two house churches. These groups, each consisting of five or six couples and single members, have been meeting bi-weekly since early summer.

Paul Leatherman, speaking at a worship service in August, shared the work of Tabor Community Services. This Christian agency assists needy families in securing adequate housing in the Lancaster area. This is accomplished by means of purchasing run-down houses and renovating them. Through the use of voluntary labor the houses are made available to low income families at a cost below their market value. The challenge of Bethel Church's assuming the responsibility for rehabilitating a house was met with enthusiastic support. During the recent fall and winter months, a number of men, women, and children have given their time and skills to renovating the house located at 16 Locust Street in Lancaster. Robert Peters served as coordinator for the project.

Every organization, including the church, needs to periodically review its organizational structure. Bethel did this several times as it considered its constitutional revisions. In January 1967, it broadened its structure through the establishment of a Christian Education Committee. Until that date, the various Christian Education programs such as Sunday School, D.V.B.S., youth work, the library, teacher training, music, etc., were directed by several different agencies. The formation of this committee helped to organize the Christian Education programs into one unified program. To give everyone the opportunity of expressing himself through music, the congregation has, since the early sixties, been served by three choirs, a cherub, a junior, and an adult choir. Those who have served in the directing of the two children's choirs have been: Lydia-marie Shelly, Christine Purves, Luella Stahly, Miriam Horst, Lois Rosenfeld, Carol Burkhart, Jean Hilborn, LaVera Schrag, Anita Penner, and Carol Wiebe. The adult choir directors, during the last decade, have been Eric Habegger and LaVera Schrag.

In 1969, following eighteen straight years of building fund indebtedness, the congregation was finally able to reach that much deserved goal of freedom from debt. Retiring a total expenditure of nearly \$62,000.00 was no small accomplishment. At the end of 1965, the building debt stood at \$8,000.00, and by the end of 1967, it was \$3,500.00. With only \$1,500.00 remaining to be paid in 1969, it was a rather foregone conclusion that the congregation would end the decade on a debt free basis. To celebrate this historic occasion, a





**Rev. Floyd G. Bartel Family**  
**Floyd, Pearl, and children, Matthew, Nathan, Katherine, and Rebecca**  
**(Nov. 1971 photo)**

mortgage burning ceremony was held at the time of the annual congregational meeting on January 11, 1970.

There was a steady numerical growth of the membership during the 1960's. The decade began with 145 members and when Pastor Shelly left at the end of 1964 there were 177 members. By the end of the decade in 1969, there were 186 members. The membership at the end of 1971 was 199.

Arthur Voth and Jacob Harnly were serving as deacons at the beginning of the new decade. Arthur resigned in January of 1964 and was succeeded on June 7 of that year by Larry Kehler who served until July 16, 1967 when his family moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he assumed the editorship of **The Canadian Menonite**. The vacancy left by Larry was not filled until the annual meeting of 1968 when Ray Hacker was elected to the Board. Jacob Harnly has the distinction of having served the longest term on the Board of Deacons. He served for fifteen years from 1955 through 1969. During 1970, there was a vacancy on the Board until James Jacobs was elected on May 24. The Board of Deacons was enlarged to three members in 1962 and Walter Horst served from that date through 1971. Melvin Glick is the newest member of the Board having been elected in January of 1972. A total of ten men have served in the office of Deacon since the congregation was organized in 1947.

The 1961 revised constitution which provided for more than two deacons also provided for one or more deaconesses. Jeanette Harnly served as the first deaconess from 1962 through 1966. In 1967, Carol Burkhart was elected to this office, and like Jeanette, preferred to serve only one five year term which expired at the end of 1971. In 1968, it was decided to have a second deaconess at which time Ruth Ranck was elected to serve with Carol. Ruth resigned at the end of the year for personal reasons and Mary Schroeder was elected deaconess on April 13, 1969. At the January 1972 annual meeting, Mary Ellen Brubaker was elected to succeed Carol Burkhart.

A successful church program is dependent upon the time and talents of many persons. Bethel always believed that the greater the participation the greater the interest. Many members have served in some capacity and deserve recognition for having done so. Since 1960 those serving on the Church Council in addition to the Board of Deacons and Sunday School Superintendents have been: Delmar Stahly, Henry Toews, John Swarr, Henry N. Rosenfeld, John Martin, John Nissley, Raymond Harnly, Lloyd Ranck, Donald Burkhart, Harry Canfield, Alan McIntyre, Clyde Shearer, John Rosenfeld, Earl Swarr, and Robert Peters. Serving as Sunday School Superintendent during this period were Jacob Harnly, Walter Horst, James Jacobs, Raymond Harnly, Donferd Nussbaum, and Delmar Stahly.

A near catastrophe struck the congregation in December of 1971, when on the morning of December 1, Pastor Bartel smelling smoke in the building called the local fire department. A search of the building revealed that several beams in the attic below the cupola were smoldering. It is believed that they may have been smoldering for several days. Squirrels gnawing at electric wires were blamed for starting the fire. It was indeed a miracle that the boards never broke into flames which could have resulted in extensive damages. During the worship service on December 5, the congregation held a special season of prayer to give thanks to God for His saving of the church building.

What of significance is the congregation engaged in as it begins its second quarter century? That the Gospel of Jesus Christ will remain central in its program there is little doubt. That it will have a concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of man is their hope. As a dedicated and committed body of Christian believers, the work of Jesus Christ will move forward for years to come at Bethel Mennonite Church.

What Pastor Don Smucker said in his 1947 article, "Farewell to Bethel of Lancaster," is just as relevant as guidelines for the next twenty-five, and beyond, as it was for the first twenty-five:

"You have a great ministry. To the thousands of Mennonites in that county you may hold forth a church conservative in theology but progressive in methods; serious and

stern of conviction but saturated in the tender love of the Prince of Peace; appreciative of other evangelical denominations but loyal to the abiding principles of the Mennonite church; evangelistic to the unsaved yet mutually helpful to those already in the household of faith; aware of the perils of modern youth but much more aware of the wonderful happiness awaiting intelligent Christian young people in a vital, balanced program of faith and works. Yes; Bethel, your ministry is one of the most challenging in the Mennonite church today. Many eyes are upon you; many prayers follow you; much love goes out to you . . . May Bethel like the churches of Revelation, always 'hear what the Spirit saith to the churches'."



### CHARTER MEMBERS

- Baer, Harold M.  
Baer, Orie M.  
Burkholder, Paul H.  
Burkholder, Alberta H.  
Eshelman, Clyde K.  
Eshelman, Florence R.  
Eshelman, Miriam (Stauffer)  
Eshelman, Guy R.  
Eshelman, Velda (Keener)
- \*\* Frost, Daniel C.  
\*\* Frost, Esther  
    Frost, Elizabeth (Wittel)  
    Frost, Esther (Schwartz)
- \* Gaeddert, Leonard F.  
\* Gaeddert, Ida F.  
\* Harnly, Jacob L.  
\* Herr, A. Adeline (Williams)
- \*\* Landis, Elizabeth  
\* Rohrer, Ruth (Nissley)  
\*\* Rosenfeld, Henry H.  
\*\* Rosenfeld, Anna N.  
    Rosenfeld, Elizabeth (Dillard)  
\* Rosenfeld, John N.  
    Rosenfeld, Tina (Milich)  
    Rosenfeld, Anna (Fitzkee)  
\* Rosenfeld, Henry N.  
\* Rosenfeld, Mary (Schroeder)
- Smucker, Donovan E.  
Smucker, Barbara  
\* Snyder, William T.  
\* Snyder, Lucille M.  
\* Toews, Elizabeth R.
- Wenger, Elmer S.  
Wenger, Esther R.  
    Wenger, Kathleen (Landvater)  
    Wenger, Marcella (Brubaker)
- \* Yoder, Helen M.  
    Yoder, Solomon E., Jr.  
    Yoder, Carl J.
- \* *Continue as active members*  
\*\* *Deceased*  
    *(Married name in parenthesis)*

### PASTORS

- Donovan E. Smucker, June 1946–July 1947  
Abram M. Wiebe, Sept. 1947–Jan. 1951  
Ward W. Shelly, June 1951–Dec. 1964  
Floyd G. Bartel, August 1965–

### DEACONS

- Leonard L. Gaeddert, 1947–1953  
Elmer S. Wenger, 1947–1950  
Jacob M. Good, 1952–1954  
Arthur A. Voth, 1954–1963  
Jacob L. Harnly, 1955–1969  
Walter S. Horst, 1962–1971  
Larry H. Kehler, 1964–1967  
Ray K. Hacker, 1968–  
James F. Jacobs, 1970–  
Melvin S. Glick, 1972–

### DEACONESES

- Jeanette D. Harnly, 1962–1966  
Carol G. Burkhart, 1967–1971  
Ruth E. Ranck, 1968  
Mary N. Schroeder, 1969–  
Mary E. Brubaker, 1972–

### S. S. SUPERINTENDENTS

- William T. Snyder, 1946–1947  
Paul H. Burkholder, 1948–1949  
William T. Snyder, 1950–1951  
Jacob L. Harnly, 1952–1962  
Walter S. Horst, 1963  
James F. Jacobs, 1964–1966  
Raymond E. Harnly, 1967–1969  
Donferd D. Nussbaum, 1970–1971  
Delmar L. Stahly, 1972

Church, 1947-1972

Church, 1947-1972

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